Zorig Chusum

Zorig chusum refers to the thirteen traditional visual arts and crafts that Bhutanese have practiced for generations. The zorig chusum arts are represented at the Festival through: painting, carving, sculpture, calligraphy, carpentry, gold- and silversmithing, bamboo work, wood turning, weaving and embroidery, pottery, blacksmithing, masonry, and incense-stick making.

Art serves secular and religious functions in Bhutan. But the creation of art is mainly a spiritual practice used to convey spiritual values. New art is constantly created to replace the old, reflecting the Bhutanese understanding of material impermanence.

The National Institute for Zorig Chusum in Thimphu (the capital city) and Trashi Yangtse (in eastern Bhutan) was established by the Royal Government of Bhutan decades ago to promote traditional art in contemporary Bhutan. The Choki Traditional Art School (CTAS), a small, privately supported non-profit school located in the village of Kabesa in the Thimphu Valley, offers training in traditional drawing, painting, sculpture and woodcarving to disadvantaged and underprivileged Bhutanese youth. The paintings and some of the carvings that adorn the interior of the lhakhang at the Festival were painted and crafted by students from CTAS.

Students at the National Institute for Zorig Chusum learn from Bhutan’s finest artists and craftspeople. They apply their new skills to create works commissioned for some of Bhutan’s most important public and religious buildings, as well as for homes, shops, and other places.

Photos by Preston Scott

The Endless Knot (pelgibeu) symbolizes the infinite wisdom of the Buddha, compassion, the ongoing nature of time, and the web of life.